

# Kamchatka

The background of the cover is a photograph of a blue wooden door. On the door, there is white graffiti that reads "Nuestra Palabra es Nuestra Arma". To the right of the door, there is a mural of a person with dark skin, wearing a white shirt and a green flower in their hair, playing a guitar. The overall color palette is dominated by blue and white, with some green and brown accents.

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La rebelión zapatista:  
productividad y resistencia culturales.

Coordinado por Kristine Vanden Berghe  
con la colaboración de Óscar García Agustín



# LA REBELIÓN ZAPATISTA: PRODUCTIVIDAD Y RESISTENCIA CULTURALES

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Monográfico coordinado por KRISTINE VANDEN BERGHE

con la colaboración de ÓSCAR GARCÍA AGUSTÍN

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# THE CARACOL AND THE BEETLE. A TENSION BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND FORM IN THE EZLN'S LITERARY PRODUCTION.

El caracol y el escarabajo. Una tensión entre ideología y forma en la  
producción literaria del EZLN

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**ABSTRACT:** In this contribution I will concentrate on the relation between ideology and form in the realm of the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas and more specifically in the tales about a character named Durito written by Subcomandante Marcos. For this purpose I will depart from the theoretical insights about the acceleration proposed by the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2005), also occasionally relating these insights with thoughts of the British-Polish sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman (2000), a thinker who had a major influence on Rosa, and of the French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky (1983) who, just as Rosa and Bauman do, examines the connection between postmodernity and time. I start with highlighting those elements of the Zapatista uprising that are significant in relation to the theory of Rosa, which I will briefly present in a second part. I will then read the narrative about the beetle Durito in the light of this theory and propose some reflections concerning how form and ideology relate in them.

**KEYWORDS:** Durito, social acceleration, zapatista discourse, Subcomandante Marcos.

**RESUMEN:** En este artículo, nos centraremos en la relación entre ideología y forma en torno al alzamiento zapatista en Chiapas y, más específicamente, a los relatos del Subcomandante Marcos sobre uno de sus personajes, Durito. Para ello, partiremos de la aproximación teórica al concepto de *aceleración* propuesto por el sociólogo alemán Hartmut Rosa (2005) y la vincularemos al pensamiento del sociólogo y filósofo británico-polaco Zygmunt Bauman (2000), un pensador que ejerció una gran influencia en Rosa, y al del filósofo francés Gilles Lipovetsky (1983), quien, como Rosa y Bauman, analiza el nexo entre la posmodernidad y el tiempo. En primer lugar, destacaremos aquellos aspectos del alzamiento zapatista que son relevantes en relación a la teoría de Rosa, la cual sintetizaremos en un segundo apartado. A continuación, realizaremos una lectura analítica de las narraciones escritas en torno al personaje del escarabajo Durito a la luz de esta teoría y propondremos algunas reflexiones sobre el modo en que ideología y forma dialogan en ellas.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Durito, aceleración social, discurso zapatista, Subcomandante Marcos.

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Dossier **LA REBELIÓN ZAPATISTA: PRODUCCIÓN Y RESISTENCIAS CULTURALES**



INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

During the last decades many writers have reflected intensely in their literary production on the political issues that have affected Latin American societies in the recent past. Cases in point are, for instance, the children of the disappeared in Argentina during the most recent dictatorship, the persons affected by the Pinochet regime in Chile, the witnesses and victims of the dirty wars in Central America, and the Zapatista Rebels in the South-East of Mexico. Those Southern Cone, Central-American and Mexican writers occasionally share hard personal experiences, include political themes in their narrative and make choices with respect to the form of their texts that can surprise in the view of the themes they discuss and, most of all, of the ideology they adhere to or are probably expected to adhere to by a part of their readers. In this contribution I will concentrate on the relation between ideology and form in the realm of the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas and more specifically in the tales about Durito written by Subcomandante Marcos.<sup>2</sup> For this purpose I will depart from the theoretical insights about the acceleration proposed by the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2005), also occasionally relating these insights with thoughts of the British-Polish sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman (2000), a thinker who had a major influence on Rosa, and of the French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky (1983) who, just as Rosa and Bauman do, examines the connection between postmodernity and time. I start with highlighting those elements of the Zapatista uprising that are significant in relation to the theory of Rosa, which I will briefly present in a second part. I will then read the narrative about the beetle Durito in the light of this theory and propose some reflections concerning how form and ideology relate in them.

## EZLN

On January 1, 1994, thousands of Mayans, their faces covered with a balaclava, occupied four municipalities in the South-Eastern Mexican state of Chiapas and declared war on the Mexican government. After twelve days of combat, the guerrillas started to use their pens as their favorite weapon, and this is also when they began to flood the national press with press releases, managing for many months to occupy the front pages of different Mexican and foreign newspapers.<sup>3</sup> The reactions on behalf of the national and global community demonstrate that the arts and most of all literature played an important role in this interest in the guerrilla (for examples of responses to the literary texts written by Marcos, see Vanden Berghe 2005). But in spite of this important initial interest, gradually the attention to the Zapatistas decreased, due, amongst other factors, to the fact that they could not manage to gain their political battles. For some years after 1994 the hope remained that their demands would—at least partially—be met by the Mexican government because in February 1996 they were approved by agreements—the *Acuerdos de San Andrés*—that granted some form of autonomy, recognition, and rights to the

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<sup>1</sup> This text is an extended version of a paper which I presented at the University of Saint Andrews at the Conference “Dialogues of Power: Political (Re)presentations in the Arts” (28-29 October 2016).

<sup>2</sup> The ideas and ideals of the EZLN are also reconfigured in other texts written by Marcos, which are a lot less postmodern, as is the case of the tales on *El Viejo Antonio*, and in writings by other mestizo or native Zapatistas. They imply different tones and ways of communication in function of different audiences.

<sup>3</sup> For a deepened study of the EZLN communication, see Huffs Schmid (2002) and García Agustín (2006).

indigenous population of the country. But the Government did not fulfill the promises that it had made and instead, the Zapatista communities of Chiapas were harassed by military and paramilitary troops even more intensively than before.<sup>4</sup> The rebels withdrew and in the summer of 2003 they created their independent Municipalities, called “Caracoles” or snails. Thus, the Caracoles are, in Chiapas, the organizational regions of the Zapatista autonomous communities. They replaced the previous form of organization, the Aguascalientes, after a period of extensive discussion about the need to change the relationship between indigenous communities, between communities and the EZLN and between communities and the outside world. Until today, the Caracoles can be considered as an attempt to implement unilaterally the San Andrés agreements, for instance with regard to guaranteeing the rights of the indigenous people in Chiapas.

#### THE POWER OF THE PEN AND FEATURES OF A CHARACTER

In order to explain their demands and to defend themselves against accusations of the government against them, the Zapatistas wrote hundreds of press releases.<sup>5</sup> These are frequently conceived as letters, which are constructed as Chinese boxes: after the brief letter appears a postscript that may include a sonnet, a fictional story, a comical dialogue, etc. In this way, they constitute a ‘literary’ and playful supplement to the political communiqués that report on the situation in the conflict zone, on the demands of the EZLN or on the Mexican or global politics. In these texts -where the fictional parts are meant as allegories of the political situation and war- arts and politics, fiction and non-fiction, are totally interwoven. Another interesting aspect of the press releases and, more particularly, of the fictional sections contained in them, is that the political authorities of the EZLN did not rely on the collaboration of writers that were external to the guerrilla. Instead they themselves took up the role of writing so that the same persons are in charge of the political decision making and of the discursive and literary activity. The most famous of them is the former principal spokesman of the Zapatistas, Subcomandante Marcos, since 2014 known under the name of Subcomandante Galeano, who has been mostly in charge of the fictional parts of the Zapatista communiqués.<sup>6</sup> The use of literary fiction by the Zapatistas reveals a third interesting feature of this guerrilla, namely the rejection of the widely spread pessimism about the political insignificance of the arts in society. The fact that they believe in the force of literature can be deduced both from Marcos’ writing practice as from an assertion he made in an interview with the French sociologist Yvon Le Bot: he wrote his fictional stories to gain the hearts of the people for the political cause of the Zapatistas (Le Bot, 1997: 356).

Marcos has created different fictional characters, amongst them one called Durito who appeared for the first time in a communiqué published on April 10, 1994 and who, according to Marcos’ version, he had created for a little girl to express his appreciation for a drawing that she had sent him. Durito reappeared for the second time in a communiqué dated March 11, 1995 and continued to appear in the communiqués so frequently that he became a well known

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<sup>4</sup> The Massacre of 45 people, among whom many children and women, in Acteal on 22 December 1997 and the assassination of the zapatista José Luis Solís Sánchez, «*Galeano*», murdered 2 May 2014 are some cases in point.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed analysis, see Vanden Berghe, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> In what follows I will refer to Subcomandante Marcos and not to Galeano because the corpus of texts I study dates from the period when he still was known by this name.

character for Mexican readers, to such an extent that even Octavio Paz, ideologically on the opposite of the EZLN, qualified the Durito stories as a “memorable invention” (*Vuelta*, 1996: 12). In principle Durito is a beetle and his name, “the little hard one”, may refer to his shell but also to his great determination. Nevertheless, he also assumes other identities, and presents himself most of the time as a knight-errant called Don Durito de la Lacandona which sets in motion an intertextual play with the Quixotic model and which demands a series of attributes in order to perform this role correctly.<sup>7</sup> A medicine bottle top serves as a shield, a straightened paperclip is his lance, a small branch his sword, Excalibur. Half a shell of hazelnut on his head is used as a helmet and a turtle – his steed – completes his outfit (communiqué of April 15, 1995). The beetle’s imitation of Don Quixote determines some fundamental features of the character: his ex-centric nature, his extravagant form of knowledge and his aim to defend the most vulnerable groups in society. Because of these characteristics he also appears as a literary representation of the Zapatistas who represent themselves in similar terms in their communiqués. Indeed, in their discourse they highlight their ex-centric position opposed to the Mexican dominant political system and to the global neoliberal hegemony. They also emphasize the alternative wisdom held by the indigenous people they pretend to represent and their general defense of oppressed minorities.

The fact that Durito is a beetle and appears as a reincarnation of Don Quixote does not impede that his identity changes from story to story. In further texts he is the teacher of Bertolt Brecht (Subcomandante Marcos, 1999: 137) or the creator of the so called cronopios and famas, famous characters invented by Julio Cortázar. And in a communiqué of March 8, 2000, Marcos calls him “Durito (alias Nabucodonosor, alias Don Durito de la Lacandona, alias Black Shield, alias Cherloc Holms [sic], alias Durito Heavy Metal” (in EZLN4: 420-421). Durito often appears accompanied by a fellow who is anonymous but is clearly a literary representation of Marcos: he has a nose as big as Cyrano the Bergerac, he is not an Indian, he loses his way in the jungle and smokes a pipe (Subcomandante Marcos, 1999: 53, 124, 154). As a consequence, Marcos does not only appear as an author but also as a narrator and as a character, which assures his omnipresence in his stories.

Furthermore, Marcos changes his identity at the same quick pace as Durito. When Durito appears for the first time he calls his friend Sancho but, for instance, in two press releases of 1995 he addresses him as “my dear Watson” or “Watson Sup” defining himself at the same occasion as the teacher of Sherlock Holmes (Subcomandante Marcos, 1999: 18, 75). In the play of these changing characters, it is noteworthy that the fictitious Doppelgänger of Marcos incarnates contradictory roles. When, in some stories, he takes the identity of the shield-bearer of Don Durito, he is called Sancho or Sancho-sup. But on another occasion Marcos addressed his public with the following words:<sup>8</sup>

Good afternoon everyone. We have arrived a little late and we ask you to excuse us, but we have come across some multinational giants who wanted to prevent our arrival. Major

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<sup>7</sup> This identification is also made evident by his habit to quote entire passages from the *Quixote* (Vanden Berghe, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> At the beginning of the Primer Encuentro Intercontinental por la Humanidad y contra el Neoliberalismo.

Moses tells us that they are windmills; Commander Tacho says they are helicopters. I tell you not to believe them: they were giants (in Vázquez Montalbán, 1999: s.p., translation KV)<sup>9</sup>.

So, in this quote Marcos depicts himself rather as Don Quixote than as Sancho Panza. In the third place, the stories are full of parody, self irony and jokes. Regarding the parody, the stories about Durito maintain a long and varied parodic play with the Quixote and other texts (cf. Vanden Berghe, 2005 and 2009). Relating to the self irony, Marcos as a rule presents himself as an anti-hero or as a depraved character, as an absent-minded professor incapable of honoring the deadlines imposed on him by the newspapers, a day-dreamer or sleepyhead who is, furthermore, scandalously big-nosed. (At a certain moment, Durito says to him: "I, sir, am a knight errant, and knights errant we can't but help the needy, no matter how nosy and delinquent the helpless in question is" (Subcomandante Marcos 1999: 53, translation KV).<sup>10</sup> And referring to the jokes, one example suffices: "How much for a bataclava? And how much for the average filiation from the waist down?" (Subcomandante Marcos 1999: 90, translation, KV).<sup>11</sup> This sexist and sexual joke provoked critical reactions from the indigenous rebels whom Marcos pretends to represent, at least according to the Subcomandante himself (Sous-commandant Marcos 1994: 15).

The stories about Durito grew constantly and eventually formed an important corpus of texts which were quickly collected in different books, the first of which (and from which I mostly quote in this contribution) is titled *Don Durito de la Lacandona* and was published by the Centro de Información y Análisis de Chiapas (CIACH) in San Cristóbal de las Casas in 1999. In this volume the last story included was dated 8 of December of 1996 but afterwards Marcos continued to write brief texts about his beetle. As the books about Durito contained only the fictional parts of the original communiqués, the stories were separated from the political discourse that preceded them in the original press releases. This separation explains why, in some bookshops, Marcos' texts moved from the section of political books to the literary section, an evolution which also illustrates how the Zapatista texts were read by the public or conceived or divulged by the editors or booksellers.

Up to this point I have discussed some general characteristics of the Zapatista literary texts that I have commented upon more in detail in the book I dedicated to the issue, *Narrativa de la rebelión zapatista. Los relatos del Subcomandante Marcos* (2005). Let us now try to answer the question to what extent some of their formal aspects are congruent with the political struggle they allegorize.

The fictional character Durito appeared mostly in postscripts of political texts that were published as letters and where, frequently, different postscripts succeed each other and

<sup>9</sup> "Buenas tardes a todos. Hemos llegado un poco tarde y les pedimos que nos disculpen, pero es que nos hemos topado con unos gigantes multinacionales que nos querían impedir llegar. El mayor Moisés nos dice que son molinos de viento; el comandante Tacho dice que son helicópteros. Yo les digo que no les crean: eran gigantes" (in Vázquez Montalbán, 1999: s.p.).

<sup>10</sup> "Yo, señor mío, soy un caballero andante, y los caballeros andantes no podemos dejar de socorrer al necesitado, por más narizón y delincuente que sea el desvalido en cuestión" (Subcomandante Marcos, 1999: 53)

<sup>11</sup> "¿Cuánto por un pasamontañas? ¿Y cuánto por la media filiación de la cintura para abajo?" (Subcomandante Marcos, 1999: 90)

occasionally are embedded in each other as Chinese boxes: in the first postscript a second one is inserted, this one being the frame for a third one, and so on; sometimes there are no less than eight postscripts in one letter. In addition, in most of the cases, the postscripts are longer than the letter they accompany. These formal traits are very unusual for communiqués of a political group and an armed guerrilla and they are, at the same time, indicative of some central political ideas and ideals of the Zapatistas. In the first place, the choice to publish their political communiqués as letters can be considered as a formal confirmation of their statement that they do not pretend to know the truth and that, on the contrary, they want to search for it by entering in dialogue with civil society. Indeed, the letter is by definition a dialogical discourse genre: the author of a letter normally expects an answer. The Zapatistas continue to insist on this feature in the recent years: “The idea is that you realize that what interests the Zapatistas is not the certainties, but rather the doubts. Because we think certainties immobilize; that is, they leave one content, satisfied, sitting still and not moving, as if one had already arrived at or already knew the answers. In contrast doubts —questions— make one move or search” (*Enlace Zapatista*). As Nicolina Montesano Montessori said: “Epistemologically, the EZLN knew where it wanted to go, but wanted to avoid imposing its view on the country” (2009: 197).<sup>12</sup> Secondly, the practice of including postscripts in a public discourse is unusual because the postscript as a discursive genre is generally limited to private correspondence. This practice illustrates another idea which is dear to the Zapatistas: that it is impossible to make a distinction between the public and the private realm, as the one is closely tied to the other. And finally, the fact that the postscripts are systematically longer than the letters can be put in relation to their idea that in society, all the minorities together form a much larger group than what is traditionally called the majority and that the so called margins of society should be viewed as their center and overrule the so called majority.

In sum, these characteristics show that the Zapatistas do not respect the traditional rules of the game in the discursive field, which, on his turn, reflects their unwillingness to obey hegemony in the political field and their will to change it. In this way, the formal ingredients of the Durito fictional texts are congruent with the political and ideological statements of the guerilla. But at the same time, there are also some less expected relations between both, as I will show next. These relations could be viewed as a tension between, on the one hand, the historical referents and political demands of the EZLN, which are symbolized by the Caracoles and, on the other hand, some stories which Marcos wrote on the beetle Durito as allegories of those same referents and demands.

#### SOCIAL ACCELERATION

To develop this point I will rely essentially on the study that appeared originally in German in 2005 by sociologist Helmut Rosa and was anticipated in 2003 in an article titled “Social

<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, one could doubt whether the EZLN makes a serious effort to search answers together with persons who do not belong to the guerrilla. Montesano Montessori formulated the following critical questions after having made an analysis of the Zapatista discourse: “To what extent is the EZLN willing to listen to criticisms expressed by civil society? To what extent, despite all referenda, is the EZLN ready to actually listen to the plurality of voices even if it does not suit them?” (2009: 253).



acceleration: ethical and political consequences of a desynchronized high-speed society”.<sup>13</sup> After presenting a short synopsis of its major arguments I will link it with the EZLN, first with its political activities, and secondly with the stories about Durito.

The starting point of Rosa is the notion that “In popular as well as scientific discourse about the current evolution of Western societies, acceleration figures as the single most striking and important figure” (2009: 77). This acceleration evolves in waves, the last and most important of which was at the end of the twentieth century; it heralded the beginning of late modernity or post-modernity. Rosa starts with distinguishing three dimensions of acceleration. The most obvious one can be defined as “technological acceleration” (82), involving intentional processes to accelerate transportation, communication and production. Whereas these phenomena can be described as acceleration processes within society, a second dimension involves phenomena of acceleration of society itself: attitudes and values as well as fashions and social relations change at ever-increasing rates (83). The third dimension concerns the acceleration of the pace of life (85) which arguably affects the experience of time of individuals. People consider time as scarce, feel hurried and under time pressure and stress and these feelings appear to have increased during recent decades. Rosa also addresses the question which forces exactly drive social acceleration beyond the feedback cycle itself (87) and concludes that there are three primary factors that can be identified as the external key accelerators.

“The most obvious source of social acceleration in Western societies is, of course, capitalism” (89) because the system rests on the accelerating circulation of goods and capital in a growth-oriented society. Apart from this economical motor, there is a cultural one that explains the success of the forms of capitalist production. More specifically, “The idea of the fulfilled life no longer supposes a ‘higher life’ waiting for us after death, but rather consists in realizing as many options as possible from the vast possibilities the world has to offer” (91). This idea implies an acceleration of the pace of life because “if we live twice as fast, if we take only half the time to realize an action, goal, or experience, we can double what we can do within our lifetime” (91). A third explanation for the dynamics of modern Western acceleration is a structural one: “In a society that is not primarily segregated into hierarchical classes but rather structured along the lines of functional systems [...] complexity increases immensely. As a result, the future opens up to almost unlimited contingency and society experiences time in the form of perpetual change and acceleration” (92). The third motor of acceleration is thus structural. It has to do with the structure of modern society whose basic principle is functional differentiation. Society is structured along the lines of functional ‘systems’, such as politics, science, art, economics, law, etc., whose complexity increases immensely. As a result, the future will be characterized by an almost unlimited contingency and society experiences time in the form of perpetual change and acceleration.

At the same time, Rosa insists that this trend is simultaneous with different forms of deceleration and inertia which cut across the spheres of acceleration. One of them is intentional and includes ideological movements against modernization and its effects. In this category we

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<sup>13</sup> A synthesis in Spanish has been published by the magazine *Persona y sociedad* of the Alberto Hurtado University in Chile (2011). In this contribution I refer to the summary in English, published in 2009.

find diverse anti-modernist social movements for deceleration (94-95) amongst which radical religious, deep ecological or anarchist movements. Rosa refers here to Peter Glotz for whom “deceleration has become the new ideological focus of the victims of modernization” (95). He also picks up Glotz’ argument that in late modern society, despite widespread acceleration, real change in fact seems no longer possible. Paul Virilio, Jean Baudrillard and Francis Fukuyama, for instance, claim that the enormous speed of events and alterations is only a superficial phenomenon that barely covers up deep-rooted cultural and structural inertia (96).

For Rosa, the distinction between late modernity or post-modernity and modernity is thus best captured on the basis of the temporal dimension, as: “Late modernity is nothing other than modern society accelerated (and desynchronized) beyond the point of possible reintegration” (97). He illustrates this process by exploring two major transformations, first regarding personal identities and secondly regarding the decline of politics (97). In relation to personal identities, he proposes that we should talk about “situational identity” which implies that

Life is no longer planned along a line that stretches from the past into the future; instead, decisions are taken from time to time according to situational and contextual needs and desires [...] Thus a conception of the good life based on long-term commitments, duration, and stability is thwarted by the fast pace of social change (100).

The reaction of people to acceleration results in a fragmented, situational identity which causes a sense of directionless, frantic movement that is, in fact, a form of inertia. Regarding to politics, these too have become situationalist (102) because politicians respond to pressures instead of developing visions of their own. Individually as well as politically, the sense of a directed movement of history has given way to a sense of directionless change. So, for instance, the Nation-State is declining because the decisions taken by its institutions are always in danger of being obsolete in a world of economical transactions made at great pace and driven by the logic of the global economic system. When we relate Hartmut Rosa’s ideas, as extremely summarized above, to the EZLN as a political organization and an artistic and literary project, some important coincidences but also some appealing tensions are revealed.

#### ACCELERATION AND EZLN’S HISTORY AND POLITICAL DEMANDS

The Zapatista rebellion has come into being in a recent context characterized by a series of quick changes which have affected the native and mestizo peasant communities in South-Eastern Mexico, and that can be described on the basis of Rosa’s model. In the second half of the twentieth century there were many transformations in the communities, which forced them time and again to leave their land and to change their way of living. The testimonies collected by Jan De Vos in *Una tierra para sembrar sueños. Historia reciente de la Selva Lacandona* (2002) offer a detailed overview of those changes. They show how the people in Chiapas have been victims of the social acceleration and of politics that have become extremely situationalist and have lost their sense of direction. By giving voice to eight “sowers of dreams” and, in his two latest chapters, by focusing on some literary characters created by Subcomandante Marcos, De Vos demonstrates that the inhabitants of Chiapas depended entirely on strategies of decision-making that evolved rapidly in function of the consecutive economical and political demands in the short

term.

Secondly, it is also obvious that the guerrilla fights against one of the principal drivers of the acceleration, i.e. neoliberal capitalism, and makes an important effort to counter its logic. The Uruguayan Raúl Zibechi wrote in an article about the EZLN:

A couple of words about the economy, or the material life: the families from the communities don't "touch" the capitalist economy. They hardly border the market. They produce all their own food, including a good dose of proteins. They buy what they do not produce (salt, oil, soap, sugar) in Zapatista stores. They save the family and community excesses in cattle, based on the sale of coffee. When there is a need, for health or for the struggle, they sell a head (2013: 3).

In fact, in the last decades the EZLN has been one of the most visible movements intending to organize forces against neoliberal globalization, as also shown by Roger Burbach et alii (2001).

In the third place, the Zapatistas struggle against the political implications of the acceleration, as described by Rosa: they resist the end of politics and of history and they oppose the disablement of the political decision makers who are replaced by the logic of the economical global system. The EZLN have a well defined historical purpose, articulated in terms of radical democracy (Montesano Montessori, 2008) and fight against political inertia. If we relate this to Rosa's reflections, it is obvious that it is the type of inertia that characterizes the profound structures and is concealed and disguised by the acceleration of the events. Neither do the Zapatistas submit themselves to the cultural driver of social acceleration, which consists of a desire to live twice as quickly. For all those reasons, we can conclude that the Zapatista rebels embody an "oasis of deceleration" (in the terms used by Rosa) or that they could be qualified as an "ideological niche of deceleration" (in the terms of Glotz) created by the victims of modernization. In this context it is revealing that the actual form of the EZLN organization is called Caracoles, 'snails', one of whose principal characteristics is their very slow pace. The paintings at the entrance of the Caracol of Oventik (cf. photograph) point very explicitly to the slowness of the animal that also symbolizes the quiet perseverance of the Zapatista resistance.

#### ACCELERATION AND LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS

The relations between the social acceleration and Marcos' stories about Durito are intriguing because these stories appear to incorporate some of the formal features that characterize the social acceleration (Rosa), liquid modernity (Bauman) and the era of void (Lipovetsky) which the Zapatistas oppose. First of all, the fact that Marcos presents himself in different and contradictory ways, reminds us of the cultural driver of acceleration. This driver generates fragmented and flexible identities that change according to the necessities of the situation. As is the case with the contemporary individuals, Marcos adopts his identity in function of the needs of the discursive and political context. For this purpose it is noteworthy that Rosa relates this sort of postmodern identity with the pastiche and the collage, two forms —principally the first one— that are also omnipresent in the stories written by Marcos. In addition, Lipovetsky argued already in the 1980 that this identity is usually expressed in a style that is cool, warm and

communicative (1983: 74), which are central features of Marcos' communiqués.

Moreover, the beetle Durito is moving from one scenario to another: based in Mexico he wants to travel to Europe, or being in Chiapas he makes plans to go to Mexico City. He is thus presented as a routing rather than a rooted character, symbolizing the nomadic and the lightness rather than the principles of territoriality and settlement. In spite his knight horse being a turtle, he travels, and in spite of his name, he does so lightly, as the exterritorial elites do (Lipovetsky, 1983: 13).<sup>14</sup> Contrary to the snail and to whatever his condition as a beetle could suggest, keeping to the ground is not his ideal or most constant practice. As their identities change constantly, Durito and Marcos, as fictional characters, can be interpreted as exemplifying the volatility and instability of identities that shop around in the “supermarket of identities” (Bauman, 2000: 83) as people do in post (liquid) modernity. What is fundamental in the characters of Durito and Marcos is the fact that they appear to change constantly their identities, while the narrator of the texts does not at the same time send a message about the threats of disruption, fragmentation and disarticulation which this shopping and displacements might entail.



En la entrada de Oventic. Fotografía de K. Vanden Berghe, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> “We are witnessing the revenge of nomadism over the principle of territoriality and settlement. In the fluid stage of modernity, the settled majority is ruled by the nomadic and exterritorial elite” (Lipovetsky, 1983: 13).



In the second place, the stories of Marcos are characterized by an onomastic identity between author, narrator and main character. This refers to the referential genre of the autobiography. But at the same time they present themselves clearly as fiction, which undermines the referential reading pact. As a consequence, Marcos practices the genre of the self-fiction as it has been defined and studied by Manuel Alberca in the first book he dedicated to the subject (2007). In its contemporary form, the genre has often been related to the impossibility to reconstruct the truth, because of the mediating role of language or simply because of the fact that there is no such thing as the truth. As self-fiction is also connected to the way the great narratives of modernity have been discredited, it appears as a discursive genre which embodies the end of politics and of history. In the same way as many contemporary self-fiction writers, Marcos presents himself in the Durito stories in a playful way as a narcissistic subject avoiding a direct and overt engagement with truth and history. Some passages he wrote about his fictional alter ego remind us of what Bauman said about the genre of the talk show in which public figures exhibit their private lives (2000: 69). An example of this sort of exhibition can be found in a passage where he refers to his relationships with women. When Durito remarks that he seems sad, Marcos answers that it is because of the breakdown of his relationship with Mariana, who indeed was his companion at that moment:

It turns out that yes, it is a woman, one of only one, she who is sea for many more things than the 'Mariana' that names her. At a bad time I moved away from her and now I can't find the way that she welcomes me again in her humidity, that she forgets bad storms, let's say, that she forgives me (communiqué of March, 2000, in EZLN4: 421-422, translation KV).<sup>15</sup>

And when Yvon Le Bot asked him why he continued to refuse to recognize his real identity of Rafael Guillén, he explained this fact by referring to esthetic factors: because it would ruin the female correspondence he received constantly (1997: 369). The texts about Durito in this way illustrate a post-modern issue, namely that the public sphere has become a scene on which private lives and dramas are staged (Bauman, 2000: 70).

But it is most of all the playful, funny and cool tone used by Marcos in the Durito stories which dovetails with the postmodern and accelerated times: the stories are plenty of jokes, irony and pastiche as, for instance, when Marcos refers to his sex appeal or when he mocks himself for not being able to find his way in the jungle. The study by Gilles Lipovetsky entitled *L'ère du vide. Essais sur l'individualisme contemporain* (1983) provides a better understanding of Marcos' tone as it adds some insights to those of Hartmut Rosa. Just as Rosa does, Lipovetsky examines the temporality of the postmodern era and his conclusions coincide in different aspects with those formulated by Rosa. Considering that the social acceleration is one of the causes that provokes the epoch of void, he associates both with a cool, humoristic style: "It is necessary that things be percussive and flashy. The humorous code electrifies the meaning. Joyous face of the process of

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<sup>15</sup> "Resulta que sí, que es una mujer, una de única, ella que es mar por muchas más cosas que el 'Mariana' que la nombra. En mala fecha me alejé de ella y ahora no encuentro el modo o forma de que me acoja de nuevo en sus humedades, que olvide malas tempestades, que me perdone, pues" (communiqué of March 2000, in EZLN4: 421-422).

personalization, the humorous phenomenon as it appears nowadays is inseparable from the age of consumption” (1983: 175, translation KV).<sup>16</sup> The joking code rules in our times. In the view of Lipovetsky this is also connected to a relaxation of the signs that is less related to an egalitarian ideology than to the consumer society, i.e. to neoliberal capitalism as a driver of acceleration. Even the French Communist Party, says Lipovetsky, abandoned the Revolution and the dictatorship of the Proletariat in favor of seduction (1983: 31). Viewed from this perspective the humorous code used by Marcos is in tune with the times in which he writes.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Durito stories and more specifically Marcos’ self-portraits assimilate various forms that are usually associated with post-modernity, social acceleration and liquid modernity as an “epoch of disengagement, elusiveness, facile escape and hopeless chase” (Bauman, 2000: 120). As a consequence, there is a tension between the historical referent of the EZLN as a political movement reluctant to acceleration, its causes and consequences, and the stories which, even if they present themselves as allegories of that referent, incorporate and assume the acceleration in their forms and in their themes. To conclude, I would like to propose two divergent interpretations of this tension.

On the one hand, the critics of the EZLN generally object to some aspects of the communiqués written by Marcos, to his use of a humorous code, their coolness and playfulness, on the ground that they could undermine the credibility of the guerrilla. This is the implicit diagnose of another Mexican guerrilla movement, the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR). This guerrilla referred to the Zapatistas in terms of “guerrilla lite” (sic) (Le Bot, 1997: 115). A similar critique was made by the Basque ETA when it wrote to Marcos:

We want to make it clear that it is not in our objectives to be part of any type of 'pantomime' or 'operetta' to be able to win the favor of the covers of international newspapers, web pages or be a reason for the next fashionable shirt in the Gran Vía in Madrid (*La Jornada*, 1 of January, 2003, translation KV).<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, these more traditional groups are convinced that the aspects of the EZLN which we discussed earlier, together with its larger communication strategies, undermine its political credibility. From their perspective there is an insurmountable contradiction between the distancing of the humorist's “light” and fashionable discourse and the non-distanced position taken by the militant. They criticize Marcos for speaking light because in doing so he avoids engaging in solid values as the defense of the oppressed people in Chiapas and Mexico. When read in this light, it is also possible to relate the stories on Durito to a diagnosis made by Arturo Arias on certain contemporary Central American fiction in his book *Taking Their Word* (in which

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<sup>16</sup> “Il faut du percutant, du flash [...]: le code humoristique électrifie le sens. Face joyeuse du procès de personnalisation, le phénomène humoristique tel qu’il apparaît de nos jours est inséparable de l’âge de consommation” (1983: 175).

<sup>17</sup> “Queremos dejarle claro que no está en nuestros objetivos formar parte de ningún tipo de ‘pantomima’ u ‘opereta’ para poder ganar el favor de las portadas de los periódicos internacionales, las páginas web o ser un motivo para la próxima camiseta de moda en la Gran Vía madrileña” (*La Jornada*, 1 of January, 2003).

he only refers once and very briefly to Chiapas): “Undoubtedly, Central American literary discourse has been disempowered politically while, paradoxically, being empowered as a commodity by globalizing trends. We can safely assume that it now aspires more to a different illusory power, that of an exoticized commodity validated in the transnational or postnational space, even though, often enough, it is no more than a copy of its old self, a pastiche, a defanged placebo, ideal for consumption in metropolitan centers for its representation of a certain tropical frisson without the risk of genuine transgression” (2007: 25).

On the other hand, the presence of forms associated to social acceleration in the stories of Marcos can also be interpreted in a milder and more benevolent way. For instance, one could underline the homology between the historical referent –the peasant communities living in Chiapas and the Zapatistas- on the one hand and the Durito stories on the other hand. In this perspective, the fluidity and instability of the fictional characters of Durito and Marcos may codify the contingencies in the lives of those referents who are far from being traditional settled indigenous people. On the contrary, we have already mentioned how the short-term economical and political decisions taken by national and international decision makers dislocated many of these peasants from their ancestral lands, made them move to the jungle or immigrate to other Mexican regions or to the USA. It could be argued that, by fragmenting and changing his self-portraits and the images of the beetle in the way he does, Marcos incorporates in his literary characters the social acceleration of which the Zapatistas have been the victims. This acceleration has prevented them in the last century from making stable life projects according to future horizons that are also stable and has forced them, on the contrary, to make time and again new life choices in function of changing identities and in culturally different spaces.

It is also possible to interpret the Durito stories as a conscious choice made by Marcos for adopting some ingredients which characterize the style and tone of the society to which he is opposed. Viewed in this way, he uses the forms and styles of late modernity well known by his readers in the hope to gain support for exactly opposite projects. In fact, this way of interpreting the discourse finds support in some affirmations which Marcos made in an interview with Juan Gelman<sup>18</sup>:

Two years after our appearance in public, that is one of the problems we have. We must continue to search within ourselves and within the relationships we have created, a language that does not make us lose the bridge with the society that we managed to build in the last two years. We know what not to do, that is, to repeat ourselves, but we still have to specify what needs to be done, and that is what we are testing. That is why we are very much in touch with people who do not come from our trajectory, I would not dare to say from the outside because they are people who are very involved in the movement,

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<sup>18</sup> “A dos años de nuestra salida a la luz, ése es uno de los problemas que tenemos. Debemos seguir buscando dentro de nosotros mismos y dentro de las relaciones creadas un lenguaje que no nos haga perder el puente con la sociedad que logramos construir en los últimos dos años. Sabemos lo que no hay que hacer, es decir, repetirse, pero todavía tenemos que precisar lo que hay que hacer, y eso estamos probando. Por eso nos sirve mucho el contacto con gente que no viene de nuestra trayectoria, no me atrevería a decir de afuera porque es gente que está muy imbricada en el movimiento, pero que ve otras cosas, tiene otras experiencias, otra historia y ha hecho otro recorrido. Eso nos ayuda a ver dónde podemos avanzar. Y en buena parte el futuro del zapatismo está en el lenguaje. No quiero decir que el zapatismo va a desaparecer, pero su futuro y su quehacer tienen que ver mucho con el quehacer de su lenguaje” (1996: s.p.).

but who see other things, have other experiences, another history and have made another voyage. That helps us see where we can move forward. And for the most part, the future of Zapatismo is in language. I do not want to say that Zapatismo will disappear, but its future and its task have much to do with the work of its language (1996: s.p., translation KV).

By speaking in the manner he does, Marcos perpetuates a strategy which the native people have used since the conquest and which consists of adopting the hegemonic ways to fight with more appropriate arms against the enemies and to try to preserve their own way of life. Indeed, it can be argued that Marcos' style serves to connect the rebellion with a daily postmodern environment, which is shared by the majority of Mexicans and other sympathizers of the EZLN. By adopting characteristics of social acceleration, he brings down the rebel imaginary from a rather enshrined sphere to an accessible form which can become a useful referent for the present militants. In this way he opens an alternative space from which the traditional revolutionary language can gain new vitality by using jokes and humor directly understandable in a daily sphere. Viewed in this way, he produces an imagined community of sympathizers by using a friendly tone and a shared laughter.<sup>19</sup>

The more general question which the above analysis raises is whether it is still possible for political actors struggling for radical changes to use forms which are totally unconnected to the postmodern society. The fact that one of the major representatives of the resistance against that society uses the very same forms which shape and characterize it, leads to the hypothesis that this is a powerful way to put the EZLN project in practice.

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<sup>19</sup> I borrow here from the conclusion reached by Carlos van Tongeren in his doctoral dissertation about Leonardo Padura but also about Taïbo II and Vázquez Montalbán, two important supporters of the EZLN.



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